

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Xian Zhang present Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto



Zhang continues critically acclaimed debut season as NJSO Music Director

Pianist Kirill Gerstein returns for Rachmaninoff's masterwork

Program also features Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and Verdi's *Nabucco Overture*

**NJSO Accents include #OrchestraYou pro-am experience,
Classical Conversations with Zhang, talkback**

Thu, Feb 23, at bergenPAC in Englewood

Fri, Feb 24, at NJPAC in Newark

Sat, Feb 25, at Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank

Sun, Feb 26, at Mayo PAC in Morristown

NEWARK, NJ (January 20, 2017)—Acclaimed Music Director Xian Zhang and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra present Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, February 23–26 in Englewood, Newark, Red Bank and Morristown. Pianist Kirill Gerstein—hailed as “alarmingly gifted” by *Classical Review*—returns to perform the Rachmaninoff concerto, one of the most enduring works in the canon.

Performances take place on Thursday, February 23, at 7:30 pm at bergenPAC in Englewood; Friday, February 24, at 8 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark; Saturday, February 25, at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, and Sunday, February 26, at 3 pm at the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown.

The program features a trio of perennial concert-hall favorites. Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto offers keyboard pyrotechnics and memorable melodies that have gained popularity beyond the classical realm through film scores and

radio hits like Eric Carmen's "All By Myself." Elgar's *Enigma Variations* is a collection of musical portraits of his friends; the central hidden message that connects them remains a mystery. Verdi's Overture to *Nabucco* highlights the opera's powerful "Va, pensiero" chorus, which became an unofficial Italian national anthem.

Zhang returns to New Jersey stages—and makes her first appearance of the season at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank—to continue her debut season as NJSO Music Director. Her welcoming concerts at five venues statewide this fall inspired critical and audience accolades.

The New York Times praised Zhang for both her skills at the podium and her chemistry with the Orchestra: "[Zhang] showed complete command of these scores and a deep feeling for them ... [The performance] spoke to meticulous preparation by Ms. Zhang, but also to a certain freedom and risk-taking on the part of the players that suggested an enthusiastic and confident response to her direction."

The NJSO's artistic leader brought "not just skill but also heart," *The Star-Ledger* wrote. "Zhang whipped the orchestra into a fine frenzy."

In a rave review of Gerstein's 2015 NJSO appearance, *The Star-Ledger* wrote: "From his first impeccable chords ... [his] playing was dignified yet full of life, with a sound that started out as present and full, yet still possessing an inward quality before torrents of descending tones and penetrating brass combined to searing effect.

"He maintained authority as the music grew increasingly tense, leaning into accents before building to blazing, explosive fury. Even in quieter sections, his playing was clean but never stark, with an appealing soft-grained quality."

NJSO Accents include #OrchestraYou—the NJSO's celebrated pro-am experience that brings amateur instrumentalists and Orchestra musicians together for a fun post-concert performance session—on February 24. #OrchestraYou is free to the evening's concertgoers; there are no auditions, but registration is required by February 17. More information and downloadable instrumental parts are available at www.njsymphony.org/orchestrayou.

Other NJSO Accent events surround the February 25 and 26 performances. Classical Conversations with Zhang and NJSO Director of Artistic Planning Patrick Chamberlain begin one hour before each concert. Following both performances, Chamberlain hosts talkbacks exploring the hidden messages in works such as the *Enigma Variations*.

TICKETS

Concert tickets start at \$20 and are available for purchase online at www.njsymphony.org or by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

THE PROGRAM

Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto

Thursday, February 23, at 7:30 pm | bergenPAC in Englewood

Friday, February 24, at 8 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Saturday, February 25, at 8 pm | Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank

Sunday, February 26, at 3 pm | Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown

Xian Zhang, conductor

Kirill Gerstein, piano

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

VERDI *Nabucco* Overture

RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 2

ELGAR *Enigma Variations*

Full concert information is available at www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/rachmaninoffs-second-piano-concerto.

The February 25 performance is sponsored by Bank of America.

NJSO ACCENTS

Inspired by the concerts and designed to inspire audiences, NJSO Accents are pre- or post-concert events that complement the concert experience and provide audience members with more opportunities to personally connect with the music and music makers.

Classical Conversation—Sat, Feb 25, and Sun, Feb 26, before the concert

Enjoy a lively Classical Conversation beginning one hour before the performances. NJSO Director of Artistic Planning Patrick Chamberlain will talk with NJSO Music Director Xian Zhang. Free for ticketholders.

#OrchestraYou—Fri, Feb 24, after the concert

Find your flute, tune up your trombone or dust off your double bass and join forces with conductor Jeffrey Grogan, other audience members and NJSO players right in the lobby of NJPAC. Advance registration for participants is required by Feb 17; spectators are invited to stay and applaud this talented group. Learn more at www.njsymphony.org/orchestrayou.

Talkback—Sat, Feb 25, and Sun, Feb 26, after the concert

Patrick Chamberlain, the NJSO's Director of Artistic Planning, and friends decode the hidden messages in works such as Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Free for ticketholders.

NJSO Accents in Newark are generously sponsored by the Prudential Foundation.

ZHANG'S DEBUT SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

Upcoming highlights of Xian Zhang's first season as NJSO Music Director include performances of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and, with Lukáš Vondráček, Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto (March 23–26); and Schubert's Ninth Symphony, "Great," and, with Jennifer Koh, Sibelius' Violin Concerto (May 11–14). She also leads a program featuring Ravel's *Bólero*, Vaughan Williams' Tuba Concerto with Principal Tuba Derek Fenstermacher, Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* and Tan Dun's Internet Symphony No. 1, "Eroica" (Apr 7–9).

Zhang closes her first season at the helm of the NJSO with a blockbuster finale that pairs Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony with Brahms' Second Piano Concerto featuring pianist Yefim Bronfman (June 8–11).

The full season calendar is available at www.njsymphony.org/events.

THE ARTISTS

Xian Zhang, conductor

Conductor Xian Zhang begins her critically anticipated tenure as NJSO Music Director in the 2016–17 season. Zhang is internationally renowned for "dynamic performances [that prove] hers is a name worth memorizing" (*The New York Times*) and "dynamism, agility and precision" (*The Telegraph*). WQXR placed her arrival in New Jersey in the top two of 2016's classical stories to watch, and *The Star-Ledger* calls the conductor "a thrilling leader who has already established a strong rapport with the orchestra."

Zhang has served as Music Director of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi since September 2009, with highlights including their televised debut at the BBC Proms in 2013 with Joseph Calleja. This season, Zhang takes on the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales (BBC NOW), thereby becoming the first female conductor to hold a titled role with a BBC orchestra.

A regular conductor with the London Symphony and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras, Zhang's recent highlights include debuts with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, as well as

performances with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, BBC NOW at the BBC Proms and Orchestre National de Belgique, where she will appear again this season.

Recent operatic performances include a return to English National Opera conducting *La Bohème* and her debut with Den Norske Opera conducting *La Traviata*. Following Zhang's hugely successful production of *Nabucco* with Welsh National Opera in 2014, which subsequently transferred to the Savonlinna Festival, she returned to the festival in summer 2016 to conduct *Otello*—marking her debut with the opera company itself.

Zhang frequently returns to her native China, where she is a regular conductor with the China Philharmonic and the Beijing and Guangzhou symphony orchestras. A champion for Chinese composers, she conducted Qigang Chen's *Iris Devoilee* with the BBC NOW and National Centre for the Performing Arts, where she will return in 2017. She led the world premiere of Qigang Chen's *Luan Tan* with the Hong Kong Philharmonic—a work commissioned by the orchestra—and the West Coast premiere of Tan Dun's *The Triple Resurrection* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Working with young talented musicians continues to play a major part in Zhang's life. She has been Artistic Director of the NJO Dutch Orchestra and Ensemble Academy since 2011, and last summer she made her hugely successful debut with the European Union Youth Orchestra, conducting them in Grafenegg, Amsterdam, Berlin, Rheingau and Bolzano.

Born in Dandong, China, Zhang made her professional debut conducting *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Central Opera House in Beijing at the age of 20. She trained at Beijing's Central Conservatory, earning both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees, and she served one year on its conducting faculty before moving to the United States in 1998. She was appointed the New York Philharmonic's Assistant Conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their Associate Conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

Learn more about Zhang at www.njsymphony.org/zhang.

Kirill Gerstein, piano

Kirill Gerstein is one of today's most intriguing and versatile musicians, with a masterful technique and discerning intelligence, along with a musical curiosity that has led him to explore repertoire spanning centuries and a diverse range of styles. He is the recipient of the 2010 Gilmore Artist Award and received first prize at the 2001 Arthur Rubinstein Piano Competition in Tel Aviv.

Highlights of Gerstein's US season include concerto performances with The Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, San Diego and St. Louis symphonies. He performs works by Bartók, Busoni, Gershwin, Rachmaninoff and Schoenberg, among others. Next month, Gerstein and the New York Philharmonic give the NY premiere of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in an edition of the composer's own 1879 version of the score.

In 2015, Gerstein won an ECHO Klassik Award for his world-premiere recording of this edition with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and in August 2016, he gave its US premiere with the Grant Park Orchestra.

As a recitalist, Gerstein performs Liszt's complete *Transcendental Études* in Chicago, Seattle and Washington, DC, this season. Myrios Classics released his recording of the etudes in September 2016. In the days following his NJSO concerts, Gerstein also gives a solo recital at Princeton's McCarter Theatre Center and performs in a chamber recital at Carnegie Hall with the Hagen Quartet.

Born in Voronezh, Russia, Gerstein attended a music school for gifted children and taught himself to play jazz by listening to his parents' extensive record collection. He came to the United States at age 14 to attend Boston's Berklee College of Music. After completing his studies in three years, he moved to New York to attend the Manhattan School of Music.

An American citizen since 2003, Gerstein now divides his time between the United States and Germany. More information is available at www.kirillgerstein.com.

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Named “a vital, artistically significant musical organization” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra’s superb musicians.

The NJSO welcomes new Music Director Xian Zhang in the 2016–17 season. The Orchestra presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at the State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick, Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra’s statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include school-time Concerts for Young People performances, NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles and El Sistema-inspired NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project). NJSO musicians annually perform original chamber music programs at nearly 200 community events in a variety of settings through the NJSO’s REACH (Resources for Education and Community Harmony) program. The Orchestra’s ECE programs annually serve more than 60,000 New Jerseyans in nearly 21 counties.

For more information about the NJSO, visit www.njsymphony.org or email information@njsymphony.org. Tickets are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra’s website.

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s programs are made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, along with many other foundations, corporations and individual donors.

PRESS CONTACT

Victoria McCabe, NJSO Senior Manager of Public Relations & Communications | 973.735.1715 | vmccabe@njsymphony.org

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